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Libertine Spaces: Anonymous crowds, Secret Chambers, and Urban Corruption in Retif de la Bretonne

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Libertine Spaces: Anonymous Crowds, Secret Chambers, and Urban Corruption in Rétif de la Bretonne

In *Le Paysan perverti, ou Les Dangers de la ville* (1775), Nicolas Edme Rétif de la Bretonne portrays the tragic life of Edmond R**, a virtuous young peasant seduced and corrupted by the libertine possibilities of the city. Forty years after the publication of Marivaux's *Le Paysan parvenu*, Rétif presents his novel as a rewriting of this work. Marivaux provided a largely positive view of the city through the story of the peasant Jacob's social ascension in Paris; but in his preface to *Le Paysan perverti*, Rétif reveals the darker side of the success of upstarts like Jacob:

> On y verra un jeune homme doué de tous les talents et de tous les avantages que peuvent donner l'esprit et la figure, se perdre par ces avantages mêmes: ce n'est point ici un exemple isolé, c'est ce qui arrive tous les jours. S'il est quelque jeune homme de campagne qui réussisse dans les grandes villes, ce ne sont guères que des sujets fourbes, artificieux, hypocrites et bornés par les facultés de l'esprit. Ceux-là font quelquefois leur chemin et aux dépens du bonheur de la société: puisque ces nouveaux-venus se jetant dans le monde dénués de tout, il faut qu'ils enlèvent aux autres ce qu'ils ont, par différents moyens qu'un œil philosophe peut suivre aisément. De là ce mouvement pénible qu'éprouvent les hommes, lorsqu'ils voient des parvenus.[1]

Rétif proposes Edmond's story as a cautionary tale to urban parents who "ignorent en partie le risque qu'ils courent en ne veillant pas avec assez de soin sur leur enfants" (1:iii). Most importantly, he hopes that his novel will warn provincials who are considering moving to the city, emphasizing the fact that Edmond's sad fate could very well be their own: "une fortune faite à la ville, est le gros lot d'une loterie; cent mille y perdent, pour un qui gagne" (1:v). A rural migrant of dubious moral reputation, Rétif posits himself as an author who speaks from experience, inviting readers to make the link between fiction and reality by giving his protagonist a name that mirrors his own.[2]

Indeed, when the novel was published in 1775, Edmond's story was familiar to many readers.[3] Echoing a real drama played out daily on the streets of Paris, the novel appeared during a period of steady rural migration to the capital. Daniel Roche estimates that between 1750 and 1790, 7,000–14,000 people per year moved from the provinces to Paris.[4] These rural migrants, young and often alone, were particularly vulnerable to the moral and physical dangers of the city:[5] the rate of sickness among migrants was menacingly high; crowded into miserable and unsanitary living conditions, they quickly fell prey to illnesses not found in the country;[6] and frequently unable to find employment, many were forced to turn to crime and prostitution.[7] According to Arlette Farge's analyses of eighteenth-century police documents, the vast majority of those arrested in Paris were ex-provincials. They committed seventy-five percent of food thefts between 1700 and 1790, and from 1738–54 represented approximately sixty-nine percent of those apprehended for crime, mendicity, and prostitution in the quarter sur-

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rounding *les Halles*.[8] The five-fold increase in the rate of child abandonment in the eighteenth century can also be attributed in part to this migration. More and more children were being born to poor families unable to support them, to servant girls who found themselves seduced and abandoned, or to single women who came to the city in order to hide the shame of their pregnancy.[9]

Given these statistics, it is easy to see why this seemingly uncontrollable migrant mass provoked anxiety in the urban population. In the social imaginary, these ex-peasants were a threat to health, safety, and belongings. Flooding the ranks of the poor "classes laborieuses" and the criminal "classes dangereuses," rural migrants were considered to pose the greatest danger to individuals and their property in eighteenth-century Paris.[10] Most importantly, as they were thought to practice sex outside of marriage and to abandon unwanted children, they could be seen as a threat to the family, an institution at the time becoming increasingly valorized as the moral foundation of society. This population seemed even more menacing because it was "floating." Often without fixed homes or jobs, thus difficult to identify and locate, migrants were seen as free to commit social transgressions without penalty.

Concern seems to have prompted an increase in attempts at public surveillance. Encouraged by the newly formed (1774–76) Société Royale de Médecine to study the relation between health and environment, beginning in the mid-1770s researchers increasingly focused on what Roche terms the "pathological space" of the city. Worried not only about the irresponsible spread of disease, but also convinced that illness was a sure sign of moral dissolution, doctors concentrated on finding and keeping track of the sick among the urban poor. In this same time period, numerous measures were taken to identify more accurately and to control the Parisian masses, among them the numbering of houses, the development of a central police record listing all residents, and the mass installation of oil-burning lanterns that kept the streets illuminated from dusk until dawn (Roche, pp. 48–50; Williams, pp. 224–26). In addition, the police worked to expand its network of spies and informants, which grew from approximately 340 to as many as 460 individuals during the 1780s (Williams, pp. 68–69). These tasks were undertaken with a sense of urgency, as evidenced by Verniquet's project to map the streets of Paris, begun in 1774. Its completion was considered of such importance that workers, threatened by incidents with the lower classes hostile to the map's creation, went as far as to survey secretly during the night (Roche, p. 50).[11] In the years surrounding the publication of Rétif's novel, an almost irrational fear seems to have inspired a desire for a panoptic city, where all actions would be seen and no crime could go unpunished.

In writing *Le Paysan perverti*, Rétif may very well have been playing on these fears. For in this epistolary novel, he not only depicts the moral descent of the peasant Edmond R**, but he also attributes this fall to a lack of surveillance. The anonymous, public spaces of Paris allow immoral and irresponsible behavior to pass unnoticed, and its closed, private spaces permit licentious couplings that similarly remain secret. Through the text of his novel and the engravings with which he illustrated it, Rétif seems to be revealing as well as contributing to the terrifying fantasms of his contemporaries surrounding the libertine spaces of the city. At the same time, he evokes a nostalgic view of the village community as the ideal transparent society, where a collective policing eye ensures the morally upright behavior of all. In this way, he invited his readers to mourn what they had lost, to reflect upon the changes, both real and imagined, that had led to their contemporary predicament: the move from the extended village community to

the isolated urban family, from one-room, communal living to houses with private, intimate spaces. Whether or not he intended it to be deliberately sensational, Rétif inscribed his novel in an important historical moment, when people were becoming conscious of and concerned about changes in their relationships to space and to their community.

When Rétif wrote *Le Paysan perverti*, the image of the city as a place of human corruption was a well-established literary topos. Fourteen years earlier, in his bestselling *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), Rousseau had developed a dismal view of Paris through the letters of Saint-Preux. In the crowded capital, the honest and upright Saint-Preux finds only solitude and alienation. He describes his feelings in a letter to Julie, undoubtedly familiar to Rétif's contemporaries: "J'entre avec une secrète horreur dans ce vaste désert du monde. Ce cahos ne m'offre qu'une solitude affreuse, où regne un morne silence. Mon âme à la presse cherche à s'y répandre, et se trouve par tout resserrée."[12] In urban society, Saint-Preux discovers that self-interest drives individuals to dishonesty and hypocrisy; their masks and games of appearance prohibit the direct communication of hearts and minds that he so desires (2:231–36). The disheartening vision of the city that Rousseau proposes in his novel has less to do with concrete realities than the polemics of his thought: far removed from nature, well indoctrinated into society, city dwellers are by definition tainted and perverse. For Rousseau, it is only in the country idyll of Clarens, where hearts remain transparent and innocent, that the joyous communion of souls is possible (2:603–11).[13]

Rétif seems to play upon Rousseau's work in his own novel, strategically underlining the affinity as well as signaling the unsettling difference between their novels. He removes these well-known images from the abstract realms of the philosophical and the sentimental, astutely manipulating them to create a more tangible and terrifying vision of the city that was grounded in either the true experiences of his reader or in the fantasms of city life then being promoted. Under his pen, these familiar lines become more immediate and alarming, an effect that is only heightened by the contrast between his twisted rendering and the original words of Rousseau. It is as if Rétif, by deliberately marking his divergence from the illustrious author, is trying to emphasize that the reader of *Le Paysan perverti* has left the world of fiction for that of reality. For example, he picks up on Saint-Preux's desert metaphor to describe Edmond's feelings of solitude in Paris. For the perverted peasant, he gives this image a disturbingly positive turn. Edmond writes to his brother Pierre (2:236):

> je me sens plus seul ici, environné de dix mille âmes, que tu ne l'es dans notre finage désert; un seul homme rencontré t'y fait apercevoir que tu n'es pas seul; tu es obligé de lui parler, de le saluer au moins, et de t'observer pour lui: mais ici, je suis libre comme l'air; tout ce qui m'environne, n'est, si je le veux, qu'un spectacle indifférent pour moi...en un mot, je jouis de tous les avantages de la société, sans être sujet à ses inconvénients. Voilà comme les extrêmes se touchent, mon ami; les déserts, et les villes les plus peuplées se ressemblent en un point.

The solitude described here is far different from the moving and melancholic loneliness experienced by Saint-Preux. Rétif's protagonist sees this solitude as

liberating, affording a freedom to forget the social mores that dictate behavior in the country. In the city, Edmond feels that he can ignore all others and do exactly as he wishes. Indeed, the picture of Paris that Rétif paints is bleak. It is a place where a sense of community has completely disappeared. Earlier in the novel, a still-virtuous Edmond laments, "ici...on ne marche pas, on court, on vole; nulle attention les uns pour les autres; très peu d'égards dans les occasions même qui le demandent; on voit que tous ces gens-là sont des pièces séparées, qui ne forment point un tout. Je crois que la politique y gagne; mais l'humanité sûrement y perd" (2:165). In Rétif's city, the lack of cohesion translates into a frightening absence of any feelings of social obligation or responsibility. In his letter, Edmond goes on to give the example of a man killed by thieves before the eyes of a shopkeeper who, seconds before, had coldheartedly expelled him from the safe refuge of his boutique. Although in all likelihood exaggerated and even fantastic, the feelings and situations that Rétif evokes may well have struck a chord with his contemporary readers anxious about the social breakdown they perceived around them.

The urban environment depicted by Rétif invites both lamentation and alarm. He emphasizes that irresponsible behavior is facilitated by the absence of criminal or social penalties. Edmond explains in a letter to his parents:

> Il est aisé d'imaginer que l'indifférence qu'ont ici tous les hommes les uns pour les autres, n'est pas un aliment pour la probité: des êtres qui tous se sont parfaitement indifférents et inconnus; qui par conséquent ne rougissent presque jamais les uns devant les autres, doivent chercher à se tromper; et c'est ce qui arrive: Paris est le centre de la filouterie, de l'escroquerie, du vol, de tous les vices, de tous les crimes qui y ont rapport. Le [beau] sexe y doit avoir moins de pudeur et moins de vertu; parce que le frein très puissant de l'opinion publique y est presque nul. (2:166)

There are virtually no limits placed on what people can do, only infinite possibilities for libertine behavior. In Paris, every individual is either the victim of crime and deceit, or is tempted into corruption.

Far from his family's village, apprenticed to a painter in the city of Au**, Edmond is first initiated into libertine society through his carefully planned seduction by Manon, the pregnant lover and sister-in-law of his master, M. Parangon. Falling under the influence of the libertine Gaudet, whose anti-Rousseauist philosophy emphasizes moral relativism and the importance of following one's natural desires, Edmond quickly abandons his wholesome rural values and learns to embrace the countless opportunities for illicit pleasure afforded by the city. His perverse appetites soon know no bounds. For example, he rapes and impregnates Mme Parangon, his previously adored mother figure; solicits the services of a prostitute, only to discover that she is his sister, Ursule; and seduces his cousin Laure and then abandons her and their infant daughter.

A complex web of immoral acts takes place within the ranks of both his biological and adopted families. By demonstrating his characters' shocking disregard for the ties of family, Rétif emphasizes the urban breakdown of this most basic system of moral guidance and protection. Early in the novel, Edmond describes the sad state of the urban family to Pierre: "Il n'est point ici de famille qui soit unie comme la nôtre: nous sommes quatorze enfants, et il n'y en a pas un qui ne se sacrifiât pour les autres" (1:22). In his next letter, he evokes the cynicism and self-interest that drives family relations in the city:

> Ici les frères et les sœurs se regardent à peine comme parents; et à moins qu'un oncle n'ait pas d'enfants, et qu'on ne doive en hériter, il n'est qu'un étranger pour ses neveux. J'ai vu même des gens mariés, qui oublieraient qu'ils ont un père, si tous les ans l'usage n'était pas d'aller se faire écrire chez lui le premier jour de janvier. (1:30)

In Rétif's city, families are either virtually absent or disturbingly negligent, allowing individual members to stray from their watchful eyes. As the novel ultimately shows, these families consequently invite the most unspeakable of crimes upon themselves: Edmond's story culminates in the unwitting marriage of his illegitimate son and daughter.

Edmond's seduction of Laure most specifically underlines the lack of proscriptive moral surveillance in the city. Within Edmond's family and village community, his action has swift repercussions: his parents immediately send a messenger to transmit their maledictions, and outraged village mothers forbid their daughters to speak to Edmond (1:259–60; 2:135–36). These reproaches have a profound, if fleeting, effect. Edmond writes to his corruptor, Gaudet, "Je frissonne; la malédiction des pères est terrible, et je viens de l'attirer sur moi!...que je paie cher quelques heures de plaisir! Il est vrai, il est donc vrai que la peine suit toujours le crime, et qu'*il la traîne après lui,* comme disait le bon curé qui m'a élevé, *liée avec une chaîne de fer!*" (1:260; Rétif's emphasis). Edmond is never inspired to feel or to express such remorse in the city, however. Like a child who knows what is good for him, he comes to desire harsh words from his urban entourage: "Je voudrais qu'on me fit des reproches; j'exhalerais du moins ma douleur et mes remords" (1:260). As the rest of the novel demonstrates, when left without this moral policing, Edmond's trespasses escalate and accumulate.

It is more than just the lack of a punitive communal presence that causes Edmond's swift corruption. The simple fact that he is unknown in the city also precipitates his immorality. Anonymity not only inspires Edmond to play deceitful games, but also keeps him from being punished. Rétif again evokes sand imagery to depict Edmond's loss of individual identity in the burgeoning capital. Edmond describes to Gaudet his impression of being lost in the big city: "l'excès de population fait que chaque individu ne paraît pas, et qu'il se trouve confondu comme les grains de sable du rivage de la mer" (2:230–31). He goes on to celebrate the complete liberty anonymity affords him. Furthermore, he discovers that he can virtually become anyone he desires through a simple manipulation of exterior signs. In a letter to his parents, he gleefully describes the ease with which a Parisian can completely transform himself through his clothing: "Il faut convenir aussi, que les particuliers étant inconnus, l'imagination de ceux qui voient un homme bien mis, a une carrière très vaste; on peut être pris pour un duc-et-pair, etc." (2:168).

For Edmond, this facile sartorial metamorphosis becomes an easy means to procure sexual pleasure. On one occasion, he dresses in a Savoyard costume and delivers a libertine letter to the wife of a goldsmith.

> J'avais choisi le moment où la belle était seule dans sa boutique. On lit: on ne se contraignait pas beaucoup devant moi; j'avais le plaisir de suivre tous les mouvements qu'inspirait la lecture: ils se peignaient tous sur son aimable physionomie; tantôt elle souriait, tantôt elle rougissait, quelquefois elle éclatait de rire. Mets-toi à ma place; est-il scène de comédie qui puisse donner un plaisir pareil? (3:67)

His appetite whetted by this relatively harmless voyeurism, Edmond launches into far more damaging pursuits. Once again taken for a courier because of his dress, he intercepts a letter from a young woman inviting her lover to a nighttime tryst. After finding the young man and observing him, Edmond disguises himself appropriately, arrives at the scene of the rendez-vous, and spends the night with the unsuspecting lady. His anonymity not only provides a night of pleasure, but conveniently serves to save him from apprehension. The deceit discovered, he tricks his neighbor into going to the rendez-vous, where he is promptly arrested for Edmond's crime. Unable to be identified, Edmond is thus unable to be caught and punished—an extreme version of the nameless and faceless peasants in Paris.

Rétif also reveals another characteristic of contemporary Paris that allows criminal behavior to remain unnoticed and unpunished: its closed interiors, impenetrable to the morally policing eye. In exploring these interiors, Rétif again places his novel at the crossroads of reality and fiction, documentation and sensationalism. Over the course of the eighteenth century, among the bourgeois and upper classes one-room living quarters were partitioned into smaller units with increasingly specialized functions. Small corridors, doors, and antechambers were installed, further delineating the separation of spaces. Thus individual family members had more opportunity to find privacy within their home; a privileged ten percent of Parisians acquired a separate bedroom of their own.

This trend toward the privatization of domestic space was also seen in the lower classes. In these overcrowded households, the bed came to designate a place where personal haven and refuge were possible. With the proliferation of religious and medical discourses that stressed the moral and physical dangers of parents' sleeping with their children, as well as the growing perception that sleeping in a communal bed was a sign of poverty, having one's own bed became the sought-after norm;[14] over the course of the century, the average number of people per bed decreased.[15] The bed, besides defining a more intimate space, was also being pushed back into corners or hidden in alcoves, rather than occupying the center of the room. Rich and poor alike increased their nocturnal privacy by surrounding their beds with curtains: in 1780, sixty percent of Parisians had enclosed beds.[16]

Rétif had images of secrecy and privacy clearly in mind when he set out to illustrate his novel, directing the artist Louis Binet's design of the text's engravings;[17] and the dramatic and exaggerated features of the engravings depicting sexual escapades exploit the moral fears and/or sexual desires of his reader. Licentious scenes take place in small, intimate spaces, a sensation produced by the short perspective used in the engravings. The scene is often a corner of a room, with ceiling and floor both depicted, giving the impression of a tight, cramped environment. A feeling of secrecy is effectively created as well. In many of the sexual scenes no doors or windows are shown, suggesting that these spaces are completely impenetrable. Rather than creating the illusion of a continuation of space, dark mirrors with shadowy reflections heighten this sense of concealment. Cabinets and armoires frequently appear in the background, symbolically reflecting the closure of the room. When not specifically featured in the scene, glimpses of canopy tops and flowing draperies hint at the presence of intimate alcoves and enclosed beds. In addition, pictorial details such as overturned lamps, clothing tossed over chairs, and accessories scattered on the floor indicate the frenzied nature of these hasty, and sometimes violent, encounters. Furthermore, these scenes are dark, with only a few dramatic spots of light, often coming from uni-

dentifiable sources, illuminating characters. Eerie and provocative, the spaces depicted in these engravings are the electrifying theatres of fantasm.

These illustrations suggest that the closed chambers of the city conceal deviant and potentially distressing sexual behaviors: adultery and homosexuality, rape and prostitution, seduction and abduction. Unsettling to some, titillating to others, the activities represented are rendered even more disturbing by clever pictorial devices that emphasize their surreptitious nature. In three engravings, almost identical in terms of their format and content, individuals enter these rooms, candle in hand, intruding upon illicit couplings that had been going on without their knowledge. For example, an abbot surprises Edmond, pretending to be the abbot, with his lover (*Plate 1*). The illustration depicts the very moment that the door is opened; shocked expressions figure on the faces of the abbot and the young lady, and her outstretched hands indicate shame and astonishment.

The engraving depicting Manon's and M. Parangon's amorous antics similarly emphasizes the clandestine nature of the scene (*Plate 2*). Edmond, uplifted hand expressing his amazement, observes the pair unnoticed, through a crack in the door. A dramatic trick of perspective makes it appear as if Manon's hand were closing the door on his intrusive eyes, preserving the secrecy of Mme Parangon's bedroom, which, as Edmond notes, "n'est jamais ouverte" (1:42). In this scene, the reader is made privy to information that Edmond does not have. While Edmond is uncertain of the woman's identity, as she seems to have Manon's voice but wears a dress that he does not recognize, the reader is able to see the woman's face and clearly identify her as Manon. Interestingly, this illustration differs from the scene described in the novel, where Edmond observes the pair through the keyhole, and is therefore also suggestive of a later scene where Edmond peeks out from behind the door to Manon's quarters and observes the illicit rendezvous of M. Parangon and a woman he has been led to believe is Tiennète, the Parangon family maid. The engraving thus hints that this woman, too, is Manon, disguised in an attempt to dispel Edmond's suspicions about her affair. In this way, Rétif emphasizes the privileged entry of the reader into these libertine spaces, making the experience of this visual unveiling of secrets all the more powerful.

Curiously, two of these engravings include the figure of an observer, perhaps intended to be taken for Rétif himself. We see this figure as voyeur-spy, peering out from behind the curtains of the bed as M. Parangon tries to rape Tiennète in a country inn (*Plate 3*). In this engraving, the figure, eyes transfixed in pleasure and excitment, shares in the reader's privileged moment of discovery, as the engraving reveals the identity of the intruder who remains unknown to Tiennète. A more detached and objective observer similarly peers down from a hole in the ceiling at the lesbian orgy of Mme Parangon, Ursule, and Tiennète, a scene that is never explicitly mentioned in the text (*Plate 4*). The possible representation of Rétif in these engravings underlines his relation to the delirious scenes depicted in the engravings and in the text. As Philip Stewart remarks, his appearance as an unseen observer may reveal that he perceives his role in his works as that of the seer and is intending to substitute for the eyes of his reader (p. 164). The illustrations of scenes never specifically detailed in the text—the lesbian orgy scene and Edmond's rape of Mme Parangon—only emphasize the importance that Rétif places on the revelatory power of the gaze. Rétif sees himself as a spy, exposing to his reader the immoral activities taking place in the contemporary city.[18]

In this way, the engravings announce Rétif's role as the "spectateur nocturne"

1. Rétif de la Bretonne, *Le Paysan perverti* (The Hague & Paris: Esprit, 1776), 3:147. Binet/Le Roy. Photo courtesy of Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

2. Rétif de la Bretonne, *Le Paysan perverti* (The Hague & Paris: Esprit, 1776), 1:46. Binet/Le Roy. Photo courtesy of Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

3. Rétif de la Bretonne, *Le Paysan perverti* (The Hague & Paris: Esprit, 1776), 1:138. Binet/Le Roy. Photo courtesy of Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

4. Rétif de la Bretonne, *Le Paysan perverti* (The Hague & Paris: Esprit, 1776), 1:219. Binet/Le Roy. Photo courtesy of Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

of *Les Nuits de Paris* (1787–88), in which he roams the streets of Paris and diligently reports on the crime and immorality he finds there, frequently alerting the authorities and even going as far as to take justice into his own hands.[19] Yet rather than seeing his personal crusade against urban vice as providing the reader with the assurance that at least his eyes are watching, Rétif seems to derive a kind of perverse pleasure from his revelations. A passage from the first night of *Les Nuits* clearly reveals the excitement that Rétif feels in exposing innocent readers to the immorality of Paris:

> O Jeune et tendre beauté, qui dors tranquillement sous la garde sacrée d'une mère vigilante, tu ne saurais jamais ce qu'endurent les infortunées de ton sexe, de ton âge, de ta beauté, de ton innocence!...Mais pourquoi ne la saurais-tu pas? Je veux t'instruire. Je veux que tu frissonnes, et t'applaudissant ton bonheur!...Je veux vous épouvanter, jeunes filles des conditions communes, que guette le séducteur barbare! Je veux vous montrer l'abîme et la sentine infecte du vice, couvert d'œillets et de roses.... Jeune homme! tu souffres impatiemment le joug imposé par un père sage: tu vois, ou plutôt tu crois voir un parc immense de plaisirs! C'est un bosquet de douze pieds de profondeur, qui masque une voierie!.... Tu verras, jeune homme, combien le mal est commun, combien le vice est laid, combien on paie cher ses trompeuses douceurs! (1:4–5)

Here Rétif reveals the combination of fear and sexual excitement that his works aim to arouse in his readers. This dual effect derives from Rétif's ambiguous vision of the city as both a critic and a voyeur, described by Paul-Edouard Levayer: "Paris est un nouveau monde que l'explorateur Rétif marque de son regard d'amoureux pervers.... Voilà qui caractérise l'ambiguïté de sa démarche où se mêle critique externe et participation interne, dénonciation et voyeurisme. Le fantasmatique perverse de Rétif brouille son discours moralisateur."[20]

In the engravings that appear in *Le Paysan perverti*, Rétif is playing on as well as creating the reader's fantasms, reacting to and stirring up his or her fears as well as his or her desires. Significantly, contemporary accounts of the novel's reception in the *Correspondance littéraire* and the *Correspondance secrète* note, with some surprise, the resounding success the novel had with both men and women.[21] Masterfully manipulating the complex psychological forces of fear and desire, curiosity and revulsion, lamentation and exaltation, Rétif appears to have played to his audience well.

Throughout *Le Paysan perverti,* Rétif develops the opposition between corrupt urban society and moral village community. The rural society he nostalgically depicts is much like that of Rousseau's Clarens, where, ever-conscious of a moral and social responsibility to the rest of the community, "personne ne s'oublie" (2:607). In Rétif's work, however, the morality found in the country proves to have less to do with the natural goodness of individuals than with the very structure of society. In his village community, all know and observe each other, which forces individuals to behave in an upright manner.[22] Furthermore, in the village life is conducted in public and out in the open; there is no such thing as private space.

In contrast to Rétif's city, the possibility for immoral sexual behavior does not

exist for young people in his village, where courting is a very public affair. Pierre writes Edmond at the beginning of his stay in Au**, concerned about his brother's frequenting of a certain Edmée: "Ne va pas trop vite en besogne: fais l'amour comme ici; on se fréquente quelquefois quatre à cinq ans avant de s'avoir, et on n'en est guère plus familier pour ça; on cause au père et à la mère plus souvent qu'à la fille" (1:55). It is not only this imposing parental presence that ensures the morality of courtship, as a complementary passage from *La Paysanne pervertie* (1784) reveals, the entire community observes the lovers' comportment:

> Les garçons vont vers la fille, longtemps avant de parler aux parents, pour voir si elle leur plaira et s'ils lui plairont. Pour cela ils rôdent quelquefois des mois entiers autour de la maison avant de lui pouvoir parler. On en cause dans le pays, et la fille apprend que Piarrot ou Jaquot *tel* rôde autour de la maison pour elle.[23]

As this passage goes on to show, the entire extended courtship is carried out in front of the watchful looks of family and community. It is the parents of the girl who ultimately have complete control over the relationship, not only deciding from the very start if the boy is an acceptable match, but also when it is appropriate for the couple to consider marriage. Throughout the courtship, there is no opportunity for premarital sex, just the sage and stolen kisses facilitated by Sunday leisure.

Undoubtedly the most powerful policing eyes in the village are those of the parents, whose prohibitory gazes are most evident during the evening meal. Edmond nostalgically evokes these orderly family dinners when he becomes discouraged by the mealtime separation of servants and family in the Parangon household:

> O mon frère [Pierre]! quelle différence d'avec chez nous! tout le monde y est assis à la même table; les garçons de travail entre nos frères; les filles à l'année ou au jour, à côté de nos sœurs, toutes servent sans distinction...notre bon père préside au-haut de la table; ce sage vieillard a le plaisir de voir ses huit filles et ses cinq garçons (car hélas! il ne faut plus me conter) les plus modestes et les plus actifs de toute la tablée: il voit les étrangers le regarder avec la même tendresse que le regardent ses enfants propres; écouter avec attention et respect ses discours instructifs et amusants. Notre bonne mère, pendant ce temps-là examine si rien ne manque, et si tout le monde est content; et quand elle a tout vu, et tout rangé, elle écoute aussi, et plus attentivement que personne.
>
> (1:14–15)

The dynamics of the gaze dominate this passage. The father not only observes the behavior of the individuals in his extended household, but he watches and judges their looks as well. The mother's eye attends to the needs of her family and servants and to the general orderliness of the scene. The lexical dominance of verbs designating the action of looking is particularly striking here: "voir" appears three times; "regarder," twice; and "examiner," once. In an almost identical passage from *La Vie de mon père* (1779), Rétif again suggests the important role of the gaze in the establishment of domestic rule, specifically focusing on the mother's controlling glances.[24] In thus reproducing similar scenes in different works, he clearly underlines that the order and morality that reign in the extended village family are the direct result of the vigilance of parental eyes. In addition, in these passages, he suggests that the egalitarianism found in rural

society contributes to this harmony. Where servants are loved and treated like members of the family, they are more apt to feel a sense of social belonging and responsibility. As Edmond goes on to explain in his letter to Pierre, urban society is significantly less enlightened. There members of the lower classes, ridiculed and abused, are ultimately inspired to take vengeance on their oppressors, thus contributing to the atmosphere of hostility and distrust found in the city.[25]

Another striking example of formidable community surveillance comes from *La Vie de mon père*. In this novel, Rétif describes at length the inescapable gaze of the village schoolmaster that catches all of his students' transgressions, even those committed during summer vacation. The teacher criticizes their immoral actions at the beginning of school in the fall:

> le bon maître rappelait toutes les fautes que ses écoliers avaient commises durant l'été; il leur en faisait nommément des reproches, ou plutôt des plaintes modérées, et les exhortait à réparer le mal qu'ils avaient causé. Il est bon de vous dire que durant les vacances le bon vieillard ne cessait pas d'avoir les yeux ouverts sur nous: il savait toutes nos actions; les peines qu'il se donnait pour cela sont incroyables; mais elles étaient prudentes et nous ne les voyions pas. (p. 10)

Further on in the passage, Rétif describes the functioning of secret surveillance as similar to "une affaire d'Etat." The village maintains a modest but menacing network that watches and disciplines its children: the schoolmaster ultimately transmits his findings to the parish priest, and the two decide together how the child will atone for wrongdoing.

In *L'Œil vivant*, Jean Starobinski notes the profound influence exerted by such a gaze on the observed individual. Evoking scenes from the first book of Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782), he describes the psychological effects that the young Jean-Jacques experiences after being caught and punished for such crimes as stealing apples and asparagus:

> Qu'importe désormais si le regard s'adoucit, s'éloigne ou se détourne. Jean-Jacques continue à le sentir, à le porter en lui, comme on perçoit par persistance rétinienne la lumière que l'on vient d'éteindre. La surveillance extérieure viendrait-elle à disparaître, la pensée de sa présence demeure invariable.... Le regard réprobateur s'intériorise; il n'est plus une puissance séparée, il n'est même plus perçu comme un regard: une brûlure permanente marque la place où il s'est posé. Au terme de ce movement d'*introjection*, le suspect s'est transformé en coupable et porte en lui son accusateur.[26]

Although Rétif does not specifically detail the children's reactions to the schoolmaster's speech, he suggests that their awareness of this invisible surveillance system has similar effects on their consciences. Learning from their teacher that "rien ne demeure caché" and listening to the moral exhortations that ensue seems to compel them to behave in a more honest and innocent manner (p. 12). In this way, Rétif's village strongly resembles the utopian society envisioned by Jeremy Bentham, who designed the architectural Panopticon for institutional use in 1787. As Michel Foucault notes in *Surveiller et punir*, Bentham dreamed of a society "toute traversée et pénétrée de mécanismes disciplinaires," a peaceful and ordered society where individuals, constantly aware of the fact that they are possibly being observed, are inspired to be moral and productive members of their community.[27] In his novels, Rétif ultimately showed his readers that the

panoptic gaze that was being conceived and idealized in the late eighteenth century functioned naturally in the village. His rural community may have seemed the ultimate community to his contemporaries, as order was kept through the internal policing power of the individual imagination rather than through the exertion of external force and violence.

Through the illustrations of the country scenes described in his novels, Rétif shows that the spaces of village society ultimately facilitate the collective moral surveillance of its members. Far different from the closed and secret rooms found in the city, village rooms are open and communal. Here there is nowhere to hide, and individuals are subject to the gaze of all. One engraving in *Le Paysan perverti* represents a village gathering: it is an illustration of the meeting between Edmée's and Edmond's families for the discussion of the marriages of Edmée and her sister to two of Edmond's brothers (*Plate 5*). In this engraving, there is a striking absence of the corners and alcoves that define the representations of urban interiors; rather, the direct perspective and flat background make this room seem large and straightforward. Unlike the armoires and swathes of drapery in the sexual engravings, here everyday objects on open shelves and clothing neatly hung on pegs indicate transparency and honesty. The figures themselves add to this impression. The large number of individuals and their arrangement in rows emphasize that this is a communal space where order and morality reign. The loving glances and gestures the characters direct toward one another are in plain view of both the other figures and the reader. Indeed, this engraving proposes an entirely different role to the reader, one that underlines the open and virtuous nature of the moment represented. Rather than the voyeur who peeks into a secret and libidinous space, here the reader is transformed into the apparent observer of an artless scene. This impression is further emphasized by the absence of the voyeur figure in the engraving. Significantly, this figure does not appear in any of the illustrations of village scenes in Rétif's novels.

Illustrations from Rétif's other works serve to uphold the contrast between city and country space developed in *Le Paysan perverti*. An engraving of the family meal that figures in *La Paysanne pervertie* depicts a similarly open communal space (*Plate 6*). The scene is again filled with individuals, arranged in a hierarchical fashion around a table. The depth of perspective, as well as the curious play of lines that creates the impression of a floating ceiling, makes the room feel spacious and expansive; and the room is shared by all, including animals and children. The appearance of part of a door similarly emphasizes that this is not an impenetrable space. Also, the series of parallel rows of dishes in the cupboard, of faces all fixing the same point, and of plates on the table not only transmit the extreme order of the scene, but also its candidness and simplicity. Here once again, all of the family members can observe each other, as can the reader; and the ancestor figured in the prominent portrait on the wall symbolically surveys all, silently reminding them of their family honor and duty.

In contrasting the city and the village community, it would seem that Rétif wanted to inspire his readers to stay in or to move back to the provinces. At the end of *Le Paysan perverti*, Pierre, disheartened by the downfall and demise of both Edmond and Ursule, draws up plans for a rural family community that will save his kin from urban dangers. "Les Statuts du bourg d'Oudun," appearing at the end of the novel, describes a socialist, egalitarian commune where the collective eye reigns. Members of the community work, pray, and eat together, thus ensuring the morality of their comportments. Even their free time is regulated by the

5. Rétif de la Bretonne, *Le Paysan perverti* (The Hague & Paris: Esprit, 1776), 2:118. Binet/Le Roy. Photo courtesy of Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

6. Rétif de la Bretonne, *La Paysanne pervertie* (The Hague & Paris: Veuve Duchesne, 1784), 1:18. Binet/Berthet. Photo courtesy of Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

communal gaze, as Article XIV clearly indicates: "Les divertissements seront publics, et par conséquent honnêtes" (4:178–79). Women are specifically given the task of watching "la jeunesse des deux sexes" during these periods of leisure (4:179). Transgressions and punishments, as well as excellence and rewards, are seen and judged by the community as a whole or by specifically appointed representatives. For example, Article VIII states, "Deux syndics, qui le seront un an, auront l'œil sur le travail, sur les labours, et sur l'entretien des animaux: il y aura des humiliations, des peines même, contre les paresseux; et des prix, des distinctions pour les laborieux, les actifs, les industrieux" (4:176–77). Pierre ends by declaring the project a success, evoking the power of the collective eye in his conclusion. He reminds the reader that in this moral community, one does not have to worry about the actions of absent loved ones, as others are always watching: "La joie la plus pure règne dans tous nos divertissements; ils ne sont point empoisonnés par les soins, les inquiétudes; ils ne font pas gémir une femme de l'absence d'un mari, qui peut revenir pris de vin, etc; tout le monde se divertit également et sans danger" (4:191–92).

Given this final moralizing flourish, it would be tempting to interpret Rétif's intention in writing this novel as an honest attempt to propose projects for reform, to imagine that, driven by his convictions about the goodness of his own peasant origins, he was out to save humanity with his morally instructive work. In fact, scholars have traditionally interpreted Rétif's works in just this manner.[28] In so doing, they ignore the cultural climate in which he wrote as well as his own professional situation. In the case of *Le Paysan perverti*, the public was ripe to be manipulated. At the time, people worried about the distressing actions and behaviors that they were witnessing in the city. In addition, works such as Rousseau's *Julie* had created an awareness of how their lives had changed in the city while inspiring a nostalgic view of the country as the place where a strong sense of community and human responsibility still survived. Because Rétif lived by his pen, it is likely that financial success was first and foremost on his mind when he wrote. Would it not, then, have been in his best interest to take advantage of contemporary concerns and anxieties? To both feed off and create public fears and desires, while suggesting that his books transmitted real problems and solutions? To exploit the licence to include racy and titillating scenes in an ostensibly moralizing tale?

As Daniel Baruch remarks, Rétif was always walking the precarious line between the Bastille and public indifference.[29] Rétif certainly appears to have been savvy in manipulating both the literary public and those in power. He was careful to create a myth around himself and his novels, seemingly in an attempt to save himself from arrest as well as to increase financial success. He actively cultivated a mutually beneficial, laudatory relationship with Louis-Sébastien Mercier, with whom he exchanged accolades in their works. Mercier particularly praises *Le Paysan perverti* in *Le Tableau de Paris* (1781–89), indicating that the book would be an invaluable warning to provincial fathers to keep their sons in the country.[30] Rétif's own works are filled with claims that his novel saved many provincials from sharing Edmond's fate: in *Les Contemporaines* (1780–83), he tells of the more than sixty Burgundian fathers who brought their sons home from the city after reading Edmond's letters; in *Les Nuits de Paris*, he asserts that more than eighty young people in one province were "saved" for farming.[31] Yet clearly his work is too masterfully constructed to have been inspired by such transparent intentions. Rather than a moralizer and reformer, Rétif appears to be the extremely con-

scious and careful "generator of social fear" that Daniel Roche suggests, the savvy author who played to his audience with such success that the first edition of 3,000 copies of *Le Paysan perverti* was sold out by Christmas of 1775 (Roche, p. 47; Porter, pp. 115–16). In the end, Rétif seems to be much like the libertine corruptors of his novels, drawing in his contemporary reader with scary and seductive tales, and tricking the modern ingenue who attempts simple interpretations of his works.

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❖ NOTES ❖

1. (Paris: Slatkine Reprints, 1987), 1:iii-iv. I have modernized the French in all quotations.

2. Widely regarded as immoral and perverse, Rétif was known for fetishizing feet, frequenting prostitutes, taking a 14-year-old mistress, divorcing his wife, and having incestuous relationships with his daughters. See Daniel Baruch, *Nicolas Edme Restif de la Bretonne* (Paris: Fayard, 1996); Marc Chadourne, *Restif de la Bretonne, ou Le Siècle prophétique* (Paris: Hachette, 1958); Frantz Funck-Brentano, *Rétif de la Bretonne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1928); Ned Rival, *Rétif de la Bretonne, ou Les Amours perverties* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1982); Adolphe Tabarant, *Le Vrai Visage de Rétif de la Bretonne* (Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1936).

3. There is some confusion as to when the novel was actually published. Although Rétif claims that it appeared on 1 Nov. 1775, the title page of the first edn. is marked 1776. The *Correspondance littéraire* (Dec. 1775) substantiates Rétif 's claim of a Nov. 1775 publication date, however, indicating that the recently published novel was a great success. See Charles Porter, *Restif's Novels, or An Autobiography in Search of an Author* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1967), p. 115.

4. Although Roche emphasizes the impossibility of knowing whether the migrants remained in Paris, he maintains that they contributed to the growth of the city during the 18th century. He estimates that the population rose from nearly 450,000 during the reign of Louis XIV (1643–1715) to around 800,000 during the reign of Louis XVI (1774–92). Citing the unreliability of demographic statistics, he also offers the more conservative estimate of a minimum 30% population growth between 1700 and 1789 (*Le Peuple de Paris* [Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1981], pp. 19, 22–24).

5. Roche estimates that on average, young men arrived in Paris between the ages of 22–24. According to a pre-Revolutionary statistic, 45% of migrants had no relatives in the city (pp. 29 & 70).

6. Between 1762 and 1776, more than three-quarters of those in the Charity Hospital were ex-provincials (Roche, p. 24). For a discussion of their susceptibility to new diseases and to illnesses associated with poor sanitation and pollution, see pp. 29 & 52.

7. In 1762, the Parisian police estimated that there were 25,000 prostitutes in the city, of which Erica-Marie Benabou believes less than 30% were natives. Although Benabou asserts that the majority of prostitutes migrated from provincial towns, Olwen Hufton points out that many of them came from the country (Benabou, *La Prostitution et la police des mœurs au XVIIIe siècle* [Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1987], pp. 26, 272–73); and Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1974], pp. 311–12). Jacques Donzelot notes that female servants, impressed by the opulent lifestyles of their mistresses, may have turned to prostitution not out of dire financial need, but rather in order to be

able to purchase fine clothing and luxury goods (*The Policing of Families* [N.Y.: Pantheon, 1979], p. 16).

8. *Le Vol d'aliments à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1974), pp. 118–19, and *La Vie fragile: violence, pouvoirs et solidarité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1986), p. 167.

9. The number of abandoned children in Paris grew from 1,000 per year in 1700 to 5,000 per year before 1790. Although Roche argues that the rate of abandonment in the bourgeois and upper classes was just as significant as that in the migrant population, Donzelot asserts that the majority of children were abandoned by ex-provincial servants who did not have the means to support a family. He estimates that the number of abandoned children at the foundling hospital of Saint Vincent de Paul rose from 3,150 in 1742 to 40,000 in 1784 and believes that this increase was aided by the invention of the turret. First used in Rouen in 1758, this revolving cylinder placed on the exterior of foundling hospitals allowed women to abandon newborn children without being seen. Interestingly, Donzelot proposes that a number of child abandonments were elaborate ruses, women abandoning their children then applying to foster them, thus enabling them to use state funds to rear their own offspring (Roche, pp. 249–50; Donzelot, pp. 15–16, 26–28; and Hufton, pp. 320–49).

10. See Alan Williams, *The Police of Paris, 1718–1789* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 1979), pp. 190–94; Jeffry Kaplow, *The Names of Kings: The Parisian Laboring Poor in the 18th Century* (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1972), pp. 127–52; and Hufton, pp. 245–66.

11. Choderlos de Laclos' letter of 17 June 1787 addressed to the authors of the *Journal de Paris* indicates that the contemporary public was concerned about the labyrinthine configuration of Parisian streets: "Il me semble que tout le monde, dans Paris, souffre, plus ou moins, de la difficulté d'en connaître assez les rues pour être assuré de pouvoir arriver aux lieux où l'on veut se rendre. Quelques-uns remédient, en partie, à cet inconvénient, en se faisant conduire en voiture; les autres sont réduits à la triste ressource de demander leur chemin.... La prodigieuse quantité de rues nouvelles qu'on a faites depuis si peu d'années, a beaucoup empiré le mal; car on ne trouve presque plus de cochers, même parmi ceux de place, à qui quelques-unes de ces rues nouvelles ne soient totalement étrangères; et l'on sent qu'à plus forte raison, les renseignements, si nécessaires aux piétons, sont devenus beaucoup plus difficiles à donner, et par conséquent à recevoir, sans compter le temps que perdent et les personnes à pied et celles en voiture, faute de pouvoir bien ordonner leurs courses, par l'ignorance où elles sont de la position respective des différentes rues." He continues to propose an elaborate plan to assign each street a letter and a number that would allow individuals to navigate the streets more easily. Although Laclos indicates that he is proposing this system in order to make daily life easier for inhabitants and visitors to the city, it is clear that such a system would also facilitate public safety and order (see *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Laurent Versini [Paris: Gallimard, 1979], pp. 597–600).

12. *Julie*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin & Marcel Raymond, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1955–69), 2:231.

13. I have chosen to concentrate on the similarities between Rousseau's and Rétif's novels, as Rétif not only acknowledged Rousseau's influence, but also appears to have played on Saint-Preux's language in Edmond's letters. However, in writing *Le Paysan perverti*, Rétif may have been influenced by other authors as well. A number of works written between 1761 and 1775 portray the experience of peasants and provincials in the city in a similar manner, developing the same contrast between rural virtue and urban corruption. For example, Voltaire's "Jeannot et Colin" (1764) tells the poignant story of childhood friends who grow apart when the social aspirations of Jeannot's family take him to Paris, where his innocence and virtue are corrupted; the two are reunited at the end of the story after Jeannot's family goes bankrupt and Colin generously offers his assistance. See Voltaire, *Romans et contes*, ed. Frédéric Deloffre & Jacques van den Heuvel (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 269–77. Two stories from Baculard d'Arnaud's *Les Epreuves du sentiment* provide a more detailed look at the corruption of urban society and the morality found in the country. In "Julie, ou l'Heureux Repentir" (1767), a virtuous provincial girl is sent to Paris and falls under the influence of Mme de Sauval, who encourages her liaison with the libertine marquis de Germeuil; at the end of the story, Julie repents her sins and enters a convent. In "Bazile" (1773), a young villager leaves the countryside for Paris at the invitation of the marquise de

Menneval, who is moved by the resemblance between Bazile and her recently deceased son. Taking on the identity of the young marquis de Menneval, Bazile is led down the path of corruption by the servant Rémi; at the end of the story, Bazile comes to his senses at the sight of his real mother, who had come to the city to save him, and reclaims his peasant origins, calling off his wedding to an aristocrat (*Œuvres* [1803; Paris: Slatkine Reprints, 1972)] vols. 1 & 2). For an overview of these and other tales treating similar themes, see Jacques Rustin, "La Séquence de l'arrivée à Paris dans le roman français de la seconde partie du XVIIIème siècle, de *Julie* à *René*, 1761–1802, principalement dans l'œuvre de Rétif de la Bretonne," in *Rétif de la Bretonne et la ville. Travaux et Recherches* (Strasbourg: Faculté des Lettres, Univ. de Strasbourg II, 1993), 6:7–36; and Simon Davies, "L'Idée de Paris dans le roman du dix-huitième siècle," in *La Ville au XVIIIe siècle. Colloque d'Aix-en-Provence, 29 avril–1 mai 1973* (Aix-en-Provence: EDISUD, 1973), pp. 11–17. For a more general discussion of the denunciation of the city and the idealization of urban life in 18th-century literature and thought, see Jean-Marie Goulemot, "Le Paris des philosophes," in *Ecrire Paris* (Paris: Editions Seesam, 1990), pp. 33–40.

14. See Monique Eleb-Vidal and Anne Debarre-Blanchard, *Architectures de la vie privée: Maisons et mentalités, XVIIe-XIXe siècles* (Brussels: Archives d'Architecture Moderne, 1989), p. 218.

15. This decrease is particularly striking among domestic servants, dropping from 2.3 individuals per bed from 1695–1715 to 1.8 in 1780 (Roche, p. 133).

16. Roche, pp. 120–21, 133–36. See also Orest Ranum, "Les Refuges de l'intimité," in *Histoire de la vie privée*, vol. 3, *De la Renaissance aux Lumières*, ed. Roger Chartier (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986), pp. 228–29.

17. Philip Stewart, *Engraven Desire* (Durham: Duke Univ., 1992), p. 163.

18. It is interesting to note that Rétif's literary role reflects his real-life activities, as he is thought to have spied for the Parisian police (Daniel Baruch, "Restif et les pouvoirs," *Europe* 68 [Apr. 1990]: 10).

19. In *Les Nuits de Paris*, Rétif frequently reports the crimes that he witnesses to the police; and on numerous occasions he is inspired to effect justice himself. E.g., on the 200th night, he attacks a group of Auvergnats who had pushed a girl into a puddle of filth, as she could not pay to walk on the planks that they had placed over the muddy street (London, 1788), 3:1900–6. For a discussion of Rétif's vision of his role and that of the state in effecting justice, see William Edmiston, "Public Protection or Social Repression?: Restif de la Bretonne and the Role of the State," *South Atlantic Review* 59 (1994): 45–64.

20. For a discussion of the duality of Rétif's vision of the city, see Paul-Edouard Levayer, "Le Mythe urbain," *Europe* 68 (Apr. 1990): 21.

21. See Friedrich Melchior Grimm et al., *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, ed. Maurice Tourneux (Paris: Garnier, 1879–82), 11:171, and François Métra, *Correspondance secrète, politique et littéraire* (London: John Adamson, 1787), 2:348–49, 365.

22. Mark Poster describes the importance of communal policing in Rétif's thought: "Since it was foolhardy to count on the individual's capacity to act morally toward his fellows, the path to morality had to lead through...society. Only the group was strong enough to coerce the individual into moral behavior" (*The Utopian Thought of Restif de la Bretonne* [N.Y.: New York Univ., 1971], p. 7). Indeed, Rétif's village bears a strong resemblance to utopian models. In *Utopia* (1516), Sir Thomas More imagines a communal society where individuals are constantly under the scrutiny of others, as their houses face each other and have no doors. The utopian society that Rétif portrays in *La Découverte australe* (1781) is similarly communal and transparent. For a discussion of the communal organization of utopian societies, see Jean-Marie Goulemot, "Les Pratiques littéraires ou la publicité du privée," in *Histoire de la vie privée*, 3:387–89.

23. *La Paysanne pervertie* (1784; Paris: Slatkine Reprints, 1988), 1:30. Rétif's emphasis.

24. In the passage from *La Vie de mon père*, Rétif emphasizes the order of the patriarchal rural family: "Tous les soirs à souper, qui était le seul repas où toute la famille pouvait être réunie, il se voyait, comme un patriarche vénérable, à la tête d'une maison nombreuse; car on était ordinairement vingt-deux à table, y compris les garçons de charrue et les vignerons, qui en hiver étaient batteurs, le bouvier, le berger et deux servantes, dont l'une

suivait les vignerons et l'autre avait le gouvernement des vaches et de la laiterie. Tout cela était assis à la même table: le père de famille au bout du côté du feu; sa femme à côté de lui, à portée des plats à servir (car c'était elle seule qui se mêlait de la cuisine; les servantes qui avaient travaillé tout le jour étaient assises et mangeaient tranquillement); ensuite les enfants de la maison, suivant leur âge, qui seul réglait leur rang; puis le plus ancien des garçons de charrue et ses camarades; ensuite les vignerons, après lesquels venaient le bouvier et le berger; enfin les deux servantes formaient la clôture; elles étaient au bout de la table, en face de leur maîtresse, *à laquelle elles ne pouvaient dérober aucun de leurs mouvements*" (ed. Gilbert Rouger [Paris: Garnier Frères, 1970], p. 130; emphasis mine).

25. Again, Rétif seems to have been bringing into play contemporary perceptions and concerns about peasants in the city. After lamenting the liberties taken with servant girls who have migrated from the country, Edmond gives the example of peasants who come to the city in order to sell their produce. Poorly treated, they get their revenge "en vendant le plus cher qu'ils peuvent, et en trompant de toutes manières ceux qui les méprisent," thus exacting economic retribution for social injustice (1:14–15).

26. (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), pp. 101–2; Starobinski's emphasis.

27. (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), pp. 233–43.

28. Critics have tended to view Rétif's novels and numerous projects for reform, including *Le Pornographe* (1769), *Les Gynographes* (1777), and *L'Andrographe* (1782), as manifestations of his displeasure with contemporary society and his genuine desire to implement moral and social reforms. While I do not deny that these interpretations have some validity, I would like to suggest that Rétif's intentions may have been more complex.

29. Baruch astutely interprets Rétif's attempts to appease and seduce the government and the public with his works that played on the desire for public order (pp. 8–9).

30. (Paris: Mercure de France, 1994), 1:604–6.

31. (Paris: Veuve Duchesne, 1784), 18:547, and *Les Nuits de Paris*, 5:2898.